

Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins

Nomination of Tara O'Toole to be  
Under Secretary for Science and Technology, DHS

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
June 10, 2009

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**I join the Chairman in welcoming Tara O'Toole, the nominee to head the Science and Technology Directorate at the Department of Homeland Security.**

**Dr. O'Toole has had an extensive medical, public health, and biodefense career and currently serves as CEO and director of the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and as a professor of medicine and of public health at the University of Pittsburgh. She was one of the original members of the Johns Hopkins Center for Civilian**

**Biodefense Strategies and served as its director from 2001 to 2003.**

**When the Department of Homeland Security was established, Congress recognized the important role that technology must play in securing our nation and created a Science and Technology Directorate to undertake research and development activities. Today, the Department is developing technologies on a variety of fronts, including biological, chemical and explosives detection, communications interoperability, and passenger and cargo screening.**

**Technological advances at the ports of entry are already helping to identify people using fraudulent travel documents. This technology allows the Department to better perform its mission of protecting the American people while still facilitating the legitimate flow of people**

and commerce – letting our friends in, while keeping our enemies out.

The Department's relationship with the University of Maine and other research universities is helping to improve our homeland security. An example of the great promise of advanced technology is the composite-material cargo-container prototype under development at the University of Maine. A composite shipping container with embedded sensors could improve the security and integrity of the supply chain while offering shippers a lighter and longer-lasting alternative to traditional steel containers.

Research and development of new technologies at the Department carry an annual multi-billion dollar price tag. To ensure that these dollars are spent wisely, the Science and Technology Directorate must rigorously test

and evaluate technologies before procurement decisions are made. Better engagement by the Directorate's testing and evaluation office in Department acquisition programs could help avoid problems such as those experienced in the troubled SBInet program.

The next Under Secretary for Science and Technology will also need to align DHS research and development priorities with the greatest security vulnerabilities that our nation faces and ensure close coordination with DHS operational components and other federal, state, and local partners. I look forward to hearing how Dr. O'Toole would address these challenges if confirmed.

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